

# I-17 expansion could affect Bumble Bee recreation area

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Kelly Powell, pictured, along with Alison Atwater have created a website to inform people about ADOT's plan to expand I-17 through the Bumble Bee area



*(EDITOR'S NOTE: This story previously ran in the Tribune's sister publication, the [Big Bug News](#). Because the Bumble Bee canyon area is a prolific wildlife and bird migration area, as well as a favorite recreation and hunting area for residents in the quad-cities, we are reprinting it here.)*

After years of study and numerous public meetings, [Arizona Department of Transportation](#) officials prefer alternative route "H" for the New River to Cordes Junction I-17 expansion project.

Route "H" starts at the north end of Black Canyon City, travels out Maggie Mine Road into Bumble Bee valley and merges with I-17 near Bloody Basin Road.

But two area residents have taken on the huge task of educating the public about what they will lose if ADOT chooses Alternative H.

Former area resident Alison Atwater, who still uses the canyon for recreation, and Kelly Powell, who manages the Bumble Bee Ranch, have put up a website opposing the plan.

A public meeting to discuss the project is scheduled for the early part of 2008. Construction could start later that year.

In January, ADOT officials announced four alternative routes for the expansion project - A, D, E and G - as meriting further study. They did not recommend Alternative "H" for further study. Now, it is ADOT's top choice.

"We still have to complete the environmental studies, but at this time alternative 'H' is our preferred alternative," said Dallas Hammit, ADOT Prescott district engineer. "It has the greatest distance of separation from the existing I-17.

"From an engineering standpoint the grades are much more inviting than they are for alternative 'G.' And, 'H' has less visual impact from Sunset Point."

ADOT recently unveiled another I-17 project that is separate from the widening project, but includes some of the same alternative routes.

The New River to Cordes Junction project expands the existing I-17 into eight lanes and could

include additional routes. The I-17 Alternate Study project is for an altogether additional highway.

Both projects have portions of I-17 starting at or near Black Canyon City and coursing north through Bumble Bee valley.

Mayer resident and former schoolteacher Alison Atwater does not want an interstate highway built in Bumble Bee. She lived in Bumble Bee during the 1990s and still hikes and visits the valley frequently.

The soft-spoken Atwater is playing David to ADOT's Goliath.

"I missed the public meeting with ADOT this past January, but after I read about it in the newspaper and saw that they had routes going right through Bumble Bee, I called ADOT to get the specifics about the project," she said from Bumble Bee Ranch headquarters.

"I did not like what I heard. I asked if it was too late to protest against the Bumble Bee route and if the public needs to speak out against it now. I spoke to an ADOT planning project manager and he said, 'Yes. Now is the time to speak out.'"

Atwater called Kelly Powell. Powell and her husband, Dallas, are ranch managers for Bumble Bee Ranch.

"I called the owner of the ranch and told him what was going on with ADOT," Powell said. "He does not like it one bit. He put me in charge of handling our official position against putting a highway right through here."

Armed with support from Powell and the Bumble Bee Ranch owner, Atwater created a Web site, [savebumblebee.org](http://savebumblebee.org), to educate the public about the valley and the proposed highway projects.

"I created the [savebumblebee.org](http://savebumblebee.org) Web site so people can read about the projects, and to make it easy for them to access the ADOT Web sites," Atwater said. "My Web site gives people an easy way to make comments directly to ADOT."

"ADOT plans to make the highway eight lanes. An eight-lane highway through here will destroy this valley. There are petroglyph sites, pueblo ruins, rare crested Saguaro cacti, and all kinds of historical sites and buildings here."

"The wildlife will be wiped out. This is a pristine slice of undeveloped Arizona with wildlife in their natural habitat. There are deer, Gila monsters, black bears, mountain lions, ringtail cats, and endangered bird species. Just about the only animals that don't live here are elk and antelope."

Powell agrees with Atwater.

"If they build a highway through here you can kiss Bumble Bee Ranch goodbye," she said. "There would be no more recreational camping, hunting, horseback riding or hiking."

"You can imagine the trash that would end up here on the ground. The noise alone would drive out the wildlife."

Alvin Stump, ADOT development engineer, said the alternate I-17 corridor study is just that - a study.

"This is the very, very beginning of looking at possibilities of a parallel highway to I-17," he said. "This is just the first step."

"We are studying the corridors between Phoenix and Flagstaff to decide, 'Yes, we need an alternate corridor, or no, we don't.' Then the planning phase starts. But that is at least 10

years out.

"You're going to see the widening and improvements to I-17 that are underway now long before this project is even approved."

Stump said a public meeting about the alternate corridor project is scheduled for December 2007.

Peggy Titus, founder of Friends of the Agua Fria River Basin, is no stranger to mobilizing public support for, or against, projects involving public lands. In the 1990s, she raised public protests against a Bureau of Land Management land swap northeast of Mayer that favored a developer. BLM scrapped the deal.

"Everyone from New River to Flagstaff needs to stop this from happening to Bumble Bee," she said after visiting the [savebumblebee.org](http://savebumblebee.org) Web site. "Everyone will be affected by this."

"Some of these routes go right through Black Canyon City, Bumble Bee, Dewey-Humboldt, and Cherry. The wildlife and beautiful scenery will be destroyed. It would also literally destroy the Black Canyon Trail."

"I hope everyone that reads this goes to the [savebumblebee.org](http://savebumblebee.org) Web site and submits their comments today."

The Black Canyon Trail Coalition and Black Canyon City Community Association, both based in Black Canyon City, oppose Alternative "H."

"Alternative H will have a high impact on riparian habitat, motorized and non-motorized recreation areas, and will violate the Visual Resource Objectives of the BLM's Draft Resource Management Plan," Bob Cothorn, BCTC secretary and BCCCA president, wrote in a press release.

"It also violates the BLM's Recreational Resource Classifications."

"Alternative 'H' will cut the latest Black Canyon Trail route being developed and it will lay directly on that alignment for about one mile."

When Atwater started her Web site, an eight-lane highway through Bumble Bee appeared a distant possibility. Now it appears a possible reality.

"People from Black Canyon City to Mayer and up to Crown King feel this is an extension of their town," Atwater said of Bumble Bee.

"It's like one big neighborhood. A highway through this canyon would cut the artery of these communities."

To learn more information about Bumble Bee and the ADOT projects, visit [www.savebumblebee.org](http://www.savebumblebee.org).

To view ADOT's I-17 widening-project Web site visit [http://www.azdot.gov/Highways/projects/i17\\_newriver](http://www.azdot.gov/Highways/projects/i17_newriver) (underscore between i17 and newriver.)

Kristin Darr-Bornstein, the project public relations coordinator, is available at 602-368-9644.